

## Visions of Happiness

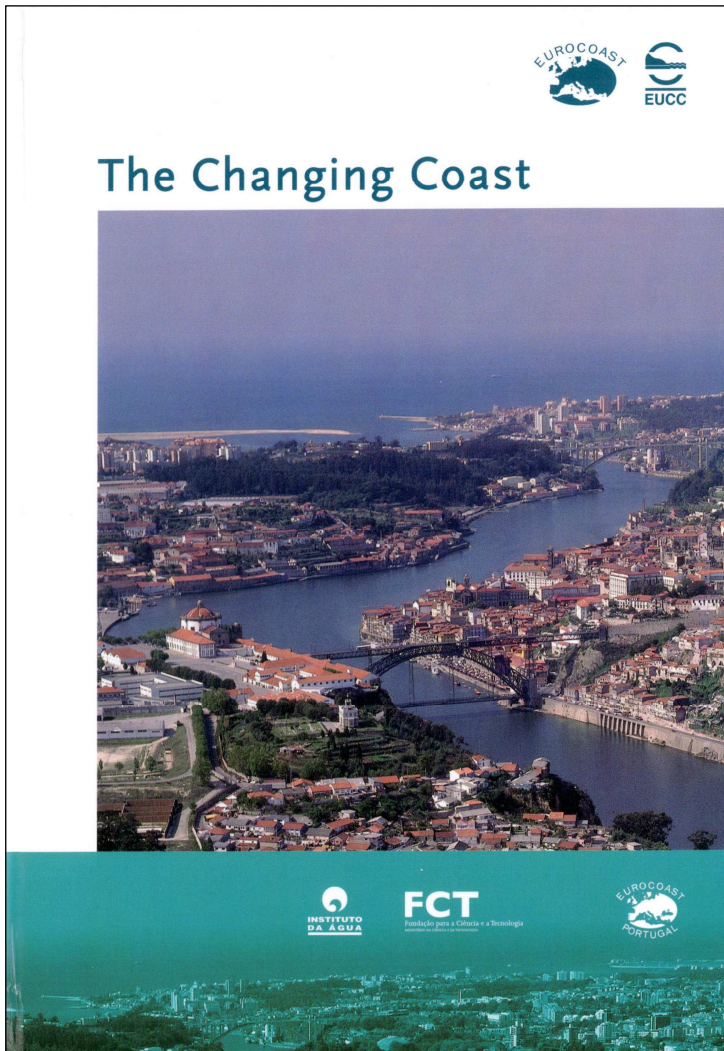
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### Abstract

The Netherlands, or better known as the lowlands, are renowned for the delicate relationship it has with water. Countless plans have been devised in the last centuries in which this struggle and the spatial implications thereof are illustrated and given form. Having been given the opportunity to rethink the Dutch coast and relation with the North Sea the obvious question arises, what is the added value of another vision? The chosen approach is therefore multifaceted. The design methodology is given as much importance as the outcomes themselves.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The design studio NAAR ZEE! (Seawards!) is a one-year research project commissioned by the National Institute for Spatial Analysis in the Netherlands. The objective of the studio is to develop a series of related and stimulating concepts regarding the future of the North Sea and Dutch coastline. The chosen concepts are approached thoroughly, backed by factual information that stimulate the political and public debate as well as the social consciousness, intellectual as well as creative, regarding both sea and coast.

The strength of the project lies in the trans-sectoral approach. Through a process of reflective design, consciously choosing for unorthodox points of departure, and combinations of design methodologies, the complexities of possible futures are visualised using a variety of media. The process is not linear and can be broadly characterised as comprising of three branches: field work (geographical / topographical) research / analysis (BrainCoast) and reflective design.

The quest for a maritime planning methodology remains central. What does it mean to design on water? Surely the traditional repertoire of spatial planning characterised by static, two-dimensional spatial claims cannot be relevant for a volume as dynamic as an ocean or sea. Can we develop a methodology that includes dynamics and change as constants? And what about the fourth dimension, time? Surely old-fashioned notions such as 'real estate' should be replaced with notions of 'movables' when dealing with such a flexible system.

Defining the future programs form an integral part of the design process itself. Through a process of reflection and continual updating, the program takes on a shape that is coherent with the field of interest at any given moment. In this way, the unexpected becomes expected and the unpredictable, predictable.

## 2. FIELDWORK

An ambition of the project is to re-introduce the art of travel, in the tradition of the European Grand Tour. Travelling with the intention of becoming wiser, collectors of impressions, flavours, smells, sand and lighthouses. 'How' one looks at something is as important as 'what' one looks at.

On a tour around the North Sea, images are captured according to predetermined theme and subject. These are archived in an organised way to enable the production of albums. Collections ranging from 'men with hats' to 'coastal morphology' in the five countries around the North Sea allow for a comparative analysis giving insight into the development of the North Sea culture.

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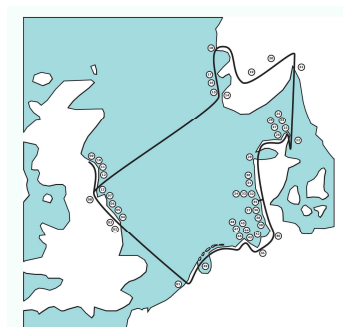


Figure 1: Route around North Sea.

Identifying signs of contemporary cross border cultural exchange as well as those through out history provides motivation for spatial interventions in the present and distant future as well.



Figure 2: North Sea culture.

## 3. BRAINCOAST

The above-mentioned themes are categorised and organised in a model called BrainCoast in which the relations between different items are illustrated (see figure 3). The innovative aspect of this model is that the perspective of research and design can be changed continuously. The themes are divided in sub-themes, which are all interconnected. All these relations are visualised. Changing the point of view involves placing another (sub) theme in BrainCoast central.



Figure 3: BrainCoast, overview.

The object coast and sea is researched within the framework of four themes, Experience, Energy, Climatic change and Mobility.

The theme Experience is given a central role in the design process and forms a framework within which the design proposals can be compared. How does one plan compare to another in terms of experiential value? By placing Experience

central, the discussion regarding the development and future of the coast and sea can bypass the purely technical and bureaucratic discussions, which lead to stagnation and rarely generate innovative ideas. Visions of Happiness is exactly that, how can we create a coast that is rich in experiential value thereby contributing to the well-being and development of the people that use it?

Experience as well as the other themes have a number of sub-themes. Indeed these sub-themes have a relation with other main themes. By placing one of the main themes, Climate for example, in the centre, the relations with the sub-themes via the main theme Experience becomes visible (see figure 4).

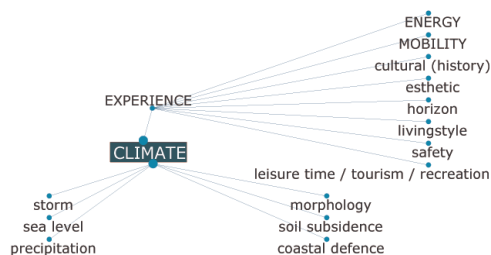


Figure 4: BrainCoast, Climate central.

This is obvious. What is more interesting is to see the direct relations between the sub-themes. If coastal defence is placed in the centre of BrainCoast it is visible that alongside relations with the sub-themes Climate, relations with sub-themes from other groups exist. So the coastal defence has connections with, for example, cultural (history) and safety, sub-themes of Experience, and with storm, morphology, sea level, precipitation and soil subsidence from the theme Climate (figure 5).

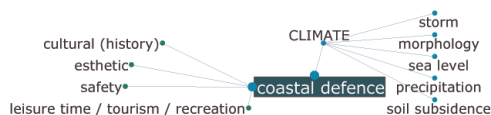


Figure 5: BrainCoast, coastal defence central.

By shifting safety to the centre, it is evident that the main theme Climate is replaced by Experience (figure 6). The sub-themes on the right hand side logically change into the sub-themes of Experience and on the left hand side the sub-themes with a direct relation to safety are evident.

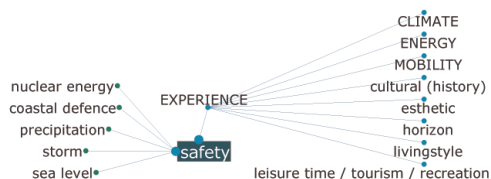


Figure 6: BrainCoast, safety central.

BrainCoast is an instrument for the systematic management of knowledge and information. It gives insight in the complexity of our own changing priorities. This is better than a static 'top ten' list does. Strategic alliances can be sought with other organisations to develop and give form to the research and design. Independent design exercises can be placed in a framework depending on where one positions oneself within BrainCoast. At any given moment a change of position is possible. BrainCoast provides a framework for this multi-perspectival methodology.

#### 4. PROPOSALS FOR THE DUTCH COAST

Recent statistics indicate that the number of people living in coastal areas around the globe is increasing exponentially. Today, the world's population in coastal areas is equal to the entire global population in the 1950's (Beukenkamp *et al.* 1993). This means that at the moment 2.5 billion of the 6.12 billion people on the earth live at the coast. 30 years from now, more people will live in the world's coastal zones than are alive today (NOAA 1994). This trend will manifest on all scales. This generates a complex design challenge for such a small and densely populated country as the Netherlands, with its limited coastline.

The Netherlands has a long tradition of coastal management and conservation that has evolved through time based on the delicate relationship that exists between low lying land on the one hand, and the omnipresent threat (and allure) of the sea on the other. Global climatic changes are resulting in a rising sea level and increased precipitation which leads to larger debits of river water flowing seawards. The pressure on the coastal zone is from two directions. Over fishing, a scarcity of space inland, increasing pressure on agricultural land, the negative effects of agriculture on the environment and animal welfare, the depletion of sweet water reserves, and the use of scarce and polluting fossil fuels for the generation of energy and warmth, leads to the notion of the sea as expansion possibility. The interest in the sea and multiple-land-use in coastal zones is gaining local interest.

In order to generate space in this zone, a paradigm-shift is necessary. For centuries the Dutch have fought a battle against the sea. Coastline reduction has been the official policy for as long as anybody can remember. Defence and safety before anything else. This point of view places safety central in BrainCoast.

The urgent need for space in the coastal zone demands a change in approach from coastline reduction to coastline extension.

Using current technologies, sand banks and dunes can be strategically positioned to radically alter morphological patterns of the coastal sand

river. By utilising the forces of nature, sand deposits and erosion in certain places could lead to an archipelago along the Dutch coastline. Ten times as much coast! The distinction sea - land is blurred. This development should be seen within a time frame of a couple of generations. The physical transformation should be in line with the mental change of the people.

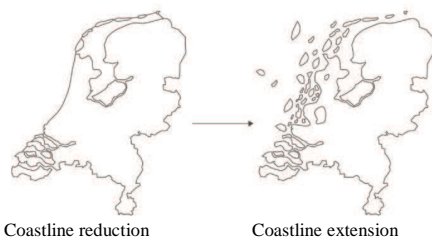


Figure 7: Paradigm-shift for the Dutch coastline.

The islands vary in size and program, generating a sea of choices for the new inhabitants of the coastal zone. Differentiation is the overwhelming characteristic of this kingdom, where high-density multi-functional use of space is contrasted with emptiness and nature.

Coastline extension involves following another path in BrainCoast. Should one depart from another experience, the physical form of the Dutch coast changes.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Besides the innovative future visions resulting from this dynamic design process, the process and methodology itself demands as much attention. Freeing oneself of all predetermined points of view by creating a flexible framework within which research and design take place leads to innovation and refreshing ideas.

By placing experience central, the testing criteria for the afore mentioned designs are no longer measurable and do not rely solely on hard facts. The result thereof is that the endless discussion regarding safety and technical solutions can be side stepped, thereby creating space for professionals from other disciplines to cross sectoral borders and focus creatively on the challenges that lie ahead.

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